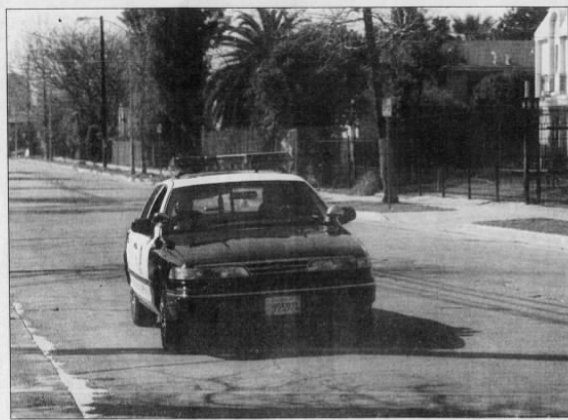


B2 TUESDAY, MARCH 2, 1999 / F

VALLEY NEWS

LOS ANGELES TIMES



LAPD Officers Raul Porras and Frank Preciado are part of a stepped-up effort to patrol Blythe Street and apply pressure on the gang.

BLYTHE

Continued from B1
Calls for police service have dropped 60% since the injunction was approved by a judge. The number of violent incidents declined from 155 in the year before the injunction, to 125 in 1994 and 117 in 1995.

City Councilman Mike Feuer said the new name recognizes the progress that has been made. "The name Blythe Street is synonymous with blight in the San Fernando Valley," Feuer said. "It is synonymous with gangs and crime and drugs, and yet Blythe Street today is very different than that."

The petition drive, organized by the Los Angeles Police Department, calls for support of "efforts to improve the quality of life on Blythe Street, including the change of street name, improvements to the lighting and the installation of speed bumps to slow the local traffic."

After 90% of the street's residents signed the petition, and the proposal is ready to go before the City Council this month. Some, like Danny Aristeaga, are skeptical of the benefits of a name-change for the street he calls home.

"It's really the people out of the area who have a problem with the name," he said. "To people who live here it doesn't make a difference. There is too much emphasis on the name."

Margaret Welch, a social worker who runs the Casa Esperanza housing program on the street, said she fears the name change is part of an effort by landlords to gentrify the area so they can charge higher rents and drive out low-income residents.

"I don't think changing the name is going to accomplish anything," said Albert Melena, who for the last five years has run an anti-crime education program on the street for the San Fernando Valley Partnership.

"I think people might want to start over, but it's got too much history," said Melena, who provided more than 200 Blythe Street parents and children with classes in how to avoid substance abuse and gang life.

Despite some progress, members of the Blythe Street gang still congregate on the street and sell drugs, Melena said.

Some of those who support the proposal, including Deputy City Atty. Jule Bishop, said the change is long overdue.

The city attorney's office has been asking for renaming for three years, but the request went nowhere until the construction of a shopping center at the old General Motors plant was well underway, Bishop said.

"Now everybody is supporting it," Bishop said.

As the person who administers the gang



A bullet-riddled sign on Blythe Street stands as a testament to reputation for violence.

injunction on Blythe Street, Bishop confirms that the street is safer and more attractive than it was five years ago.

"That's what has inspired residents such as Mike,"

"The new name would be an attack and

challenge to the Blythe Street gang, which for many years has tried to rule the neighborhood, Mike said.

"Can you imagine gang members getting

Amber Way tattooed?" she said.

Threatening Letter Sent to Elementary Principal

■ **Crime:** Writer made reference to last month's beating of fellow school administrator Norman Bernstein. Police are investigating.

By NANCY TREJOS
Times Staff Writer

VAN NUYS—Police are investigating a threatening letter sent to an elementary school principal that referred to the beating of a school principal in Panorama City, authorities said Monday.

A secretary at Kester Avenue Elementary received the letter Friday addressed to Principal Petronella Montante, and immediately called Montante, who was not at school that day, said Sheri Erlich, spokesman for the Los Angeles Unified School District. Montante told the secretary to call the police, he said.

Erlich said the letter suggested that an attack similar to last month's beating of Norman Bernstein could occur against Montante.

Bernstein, principal of the predominantly Latino Burton Street Elementary School, told police that before beating him unconscious, two men told him they did not want him on campus because he was white.

LAPD detectives refused to discuss the contents of the letter. "There's nothing to indicate

that it's motivated by hatred or prejudice," said Van Nuys Division Det. David Kacoo. "There's nothing to indicate a motivation or that any particular students or parents are involved."

He said that Montante is white. Both the Los Angeles Police

'There's nothing to indicate that it's motivated by hatred or prejudice. There's nothing to indicate a motivation or that any particular students or parents are involved.'

DAVID ESCOTO
Detective,
LAPD Van Nuys Division

Department and school district police are investigating the incident.

"Appropriate steps are being taken to make sure that the school, staff and principal are safe," Erlich said.

Montante did not return phone calls Monday.

New Manager Assumes Duties at Van Nuys Airport

VAN NUYS—Jens O. Rivera took over as manager of Van Nuys Airport on Monday, putting him in charge of operations at the 725-acre airfield.

Rivera, who served as both acting manager and assistant manager of Ontario International Airport, succeeds Ronald Kochivar, who held the Van Nuys post for more than seven years.

The issues that Rivera will be grappling with include a proposal to limit the number of older, noisier jets based at the airfield, the airport master plan, and efforts to soundproof the homes of nearby residents.

In addition, Rivera will have to balance concerns of private aviators with complaints from neighbors and their political leaders about air traffic and noise.

Before his appointment to the Van Nuys job, Rivera worked at Los Angeles International Airport as a telecommunications manager and staff assistant. He also held city posts with the Los Angeles Harbor, Municipal Auditorium and Community Development departments.

Van Nuys Airport contributes nearly \$1 billion and 8,751 jobs to the Southern California economy, according to airport officials.

Obituaries

Asala, Ceytano M., 82, of Lake View Terrace, retired farmer. Forest Lawn, Hollywood Hills.

Alamirano, Johnny Joe, 60, of Sylmar, registered nurse. San Fernando Mortuary, San Fernando.

Cady, Elsie Bredgen, 106, of Reseda, homemaker. Bastian & Perrotti Mortuary, Northridge.

Ejalsen, Lucy, 97, of Van Nuys, retired fruit packer for Bole-Smith Packaging Co. Bastian & Perrotti Mortuary, Northridge.

Eye, Jesse Paul, 18, formerly of Reseda, food service worker for Magic Mountain. Crawford Mortuary, Northridge.

Galleia, Carmela M., 50, of Sun Valley, landscaper. Pierce Bros. Vahlia Mortuary, North Hollywood.

Ham, Joan Miller, 79, of Van

Nuys, homemaker. Forest Lawn, Hollywood Hills.

Johann, Anna C., 102, of Glendale, homemaker. Forest Lawn, Hollywood Hills.

Lane, Osborne Henry, 81, of Santa Clarita, retired manager for Western Electric Service, the Valley Funeral Home, Burbank.

Pala, Wilfrido G., 44, of Glendale, controller/manager for Second Generation. Forest Lawn, Hollywood Hills.

Steele, Nedra P., 87, of Burbank, china decorator for Ridgewood China. Eckerman-Heiman Funeral Service, Burbank.

Obituaries are published free of charge as a public service to readers. They are based on information provided by mortuaries.

VANISH

Continued from B1
them up into some vans and sports utility vehicles, and drove out of the airport," Alho said. "There was no force. No fear. These kids went willingly."

While police carefully avoided using the term "defection," they stuck to Kalish's description of the event—"an organized attempt... to remain in the United States."

"Without going into further detail, Alho said that description was based on "the totality of the circumstances."

Kalish said that—that far, at

least—none of the students is believed to have asked for asylum.

He said that the State Department and the Immigration and Naturalization Service had been notified, but for now the case is being handled by LAPD missing persons investigators. The FBI did not respond to requests for information about the case.

Toad Patterson, director of the training center, said the teenagers had been staying with host families in the Redlands area while attending classes.

"This was a good group of kids," Patterson said. "Nothing went on that clouded me that this sort of thing might occur. We've had students

from China before, but nothing like this ever happened."

Patterson said the students applied for the program in China and were accepted after they received student visas from a U.S. consulate there. He said they had come directly to Redlands for the language program and had not traveled elsewhere in the United States.

Asked where the disappearance apparently fit between defection and some sort of juvenile prank, Alho said he wasn't sure, but it could be somewhere in between.

"But if they're just down at Disneyland right now, they'd better be having a good time," he said. "Because there's going to be hell to pay."

In the Kitchen
RUSS PARSONS

"How do you peel a mango?"

Los Angeles Times Food Wednesdays

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